

"We live in fear, we feel so unsafe": the imagination and fear of rape in South Africa

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**“We Live in Fear, We Feel Very Unsafe”:
Imagining and Fearing Rape in South Africa**

Simidele Dosekun

Abstract

This article explores the meanings of rape in South Africa for fifteen women at the University of Cape Town who claim to have *not* experienced rape. It is based upon qualitative interviews with these women and offers a discursive analysis of their talk. The article shows that the women tend to distance the actual occurrence and threat of rape. At the same time, they assume a natural vulnerability to rape, with the result that they imagine and fear it as always possible in the course of their daily lives. The article reconstructs the ways in which the women’s imagination and fear of rape adversely impacts upon their sense of safety, agency and belonging in South Africa today. Illustrating the power of discourses to shape both subjective and social realities, it concludes that feminist research and activism must pay attention to the discursive dimensions of the rape crisis in South Africa.

Keywords: Rape, Fear, Discourse, Subjectivity

Introduction

There is a rape crisis in the new South Africa, according to academic, activist and media discourses within and beyond the country (du Toit 2005; Nutall 2004; Posel 2005). Through these channels, the post-apartheid nation has been exposed and constructed as a space in which the rape of women and children by men is horrifically prevalent. The rape statistics are a key source of this knowledge, despite methodological and political disagreement over where the figures precisely stand (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). Crime data for the year 2006/7 from the South African Police Service show a ratio of 111 reported rapes per 100,000 members of the population (“Rape in the RSA”). While this may be the most readily available source of national data, Jewkes and Abrahams argue that such cases represent only the “tip of the iceberg” because various social pressures discourage women from reporting rape (2002:1231). In tandem with the statistics, media coverage of high profile and sensationalist rape cases, including “baby-rape,” has served to bring the issue to general public consciousness (Posel 2005:247). Most recently, the controversial trial and acquittal in 2006 of the former Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, revealed the depth of public contestation over the nature and gendered politics of rape in South Africa.¹

This article proposes to explore the meanings and impact of rape in South Africa for women who claim to have never experienced rape. This focus is theoretically and politically informed by the feminist perspective that male violence against women is a structural feature of patriarchy which variously implicates *all* women. Put most simply, feminists contend that all women are impacted by male violence to the extent that they

¹ Jacob Zuma was acquitted of the rape of a family friend in May 2006 after a highly publicised and divisive trial during which his supporters and anti-rape activists continuously protested outside the court. His accuser was villified by his supporters and fled the country after the end of the trial.

fear and perceive it as a constant threat (e.g. Gordon and Riger 1989; Kelly and Radford 1996; Stanko 1995). It has been widely documented in Western contexts that women especially fear rape (e.g. Gordon and Riger 1989; Warr 1985). Gordon and Riger (1989) name this the paradigmatic “female fear,” while MacKinnon asserts more broadly that “all women live all the time under the shadow of the threat of sexual abuse” (1989:340). In South Africa, du Toit (2005) similarly declares that all women’s lives are haunted by the spectre of rape. She argues that the ongoing rape crisis “translates for ordinary South African women into pervasive fear, systematic (contagious) humiliation, and incapacitation” (2005:261). The ordinary woman now “lives out on a daily basis her fear of being raped... She lives an imposed identity of the sexually vulnerable simply on the basis of being female” (ibid.).

A feminist post-structuralist approach allows us to theorise why fear and perceived vulnerability to rape may be central to women’s subjectivities. Post-structuralist theories maintain that subjectivity is discursively constituted, meaning that the subject takes up a range of positions and practices available in existing discourses (Mehta and Bondi 1999:69; Hollway 1984). These discourses are historically and socially situated, and are linked to power and subject to resistance and change (Foucault 1990). Dominant discourses of violence and vulnerability are deeply gendered. They essentialise men as the physically strong sex and women as the weaker, hence relatively incapable of violence against men. Notions of women’s vulnerability take on a further specificity with regards to rape. Whereas male sexuality is typically constructed as active, acquiring and even needing frequent release—what Hollway calls the “male sexual drive discourse” (1984:233)—female sexuality is usually said to be passive, enacted by the giving or withholding of consent to men. As rape pivots on the issue of non-consent, it is constructed within the terms of such discourses as something men do to women and not vice versa because men are capable of initiating and forcing sex despite non-consent.

The essentialist gendering of rape as an act men commit and women suffer persists in dominant discourses and imaginations despite the reality that men are also raped and that women may also rape. It is institutionalised in South African law which defines rape as forced penetration of the vagina by a penis.² In such ways, hegemonic discourses position women as naturally and uniquely vulnerable to rape because they are women. If this is the embodied subject position most available, indeed naturalised and institutionalised for women, it follows that they may come to identify and experience themselves as such. That is, women may come to construct their sense of self and body relative to their perceived vulnerability to rape. Even if a woman never actually experiences rape then, she may think of it as always inherently possible because of her gender.

This article proceeds from this theoretical premise to empirically explore if and how rape shapes the self-awareness and lives of fifteen women located at the University of Cape Town who say they have never been raped. Specifically, I explore how these women speak about rape in terms of their personal risk and safety and rights and belonging South Africa today. I argue briefly that the women construct rape as highly prevalent in their society but ordinarily distant from their personal lives. However, because they assume a gendered vulnerability to rape, I show that the women readily

²The new Sexual Offences Bill redefines rape to include any forced sexual penetration, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator or victim. It was approved by the National Assembly in May 2007 but is yet to be passed by Parliament.

imagine, fear and thus talk of the possibility of rape. This imagination and fear restricts them in their daily lives, compromises their sense of embodied agency, and infringes upon their full rights as South African citizens.

Methodology

This article is based on data I collected from individual, qualitative interviews with fifteen women studying or, in one case, working, at the University of Cape Town (UCT). These women ranged in age from 18 to 45, and identified as white (7), black African (5), or coloured (3). The majority were of middle to upper-middle class status. All were physically able-bodied and all identified as heterosexual with the exception of one who identified as bisexual. Physical disability and homosexual orientation are factors which may influence women's feelings of vulnerability to violence if, for instance, their mobility is impaired (Pain 1997) or if they are deliberately targeted by homophobic violence, as has been the recent case for black lesbians in South Africa (Muholi 2004).

I primarily recruited the women in this study by putting up posters across the UCT campus inviting women who had never experienced rape to participate in a confidential interview about the phenomenon in South Africa. Thus the women self-identified as subjects who had never been raped. The interviews were semi-structured to cover themes such as the women's experiences of violence, interactions and relationships with men, and mobility and uses of space. In addition, I sought to hear their analytic theories about rape and its popular representations in South Africa. We also often discussed my relevant experiences and theories on the matters at hand, as a woman who also attested to never having been raped. I offered my views to the women with the feminist epistemological understanding that the researcher's subjectivity and politics necessarily shape the interview, and may then be brought explicitly and dialogically into it (Mama 1995; Saukko 2002). My feminist commitment to democratic research practice also motivated my concern that the women not experience me as a distant or expert interviewer, judging their views against some putatively 'objective' standard (Oakley 1981).

That said, I experienced a tension both ethical and methodological in my other aim as researcher to critically analyse the women's words. I feel this all the more keenly because a number expressed views on rape and race which I personally found problematic. Also, I take a discursive analytic approach to the interview data, meaning I seek to trace the discourses the women deployed in their talk, which implicitly presumes my ability see through to the source of what they said (Saukko 2002). I understand discourses as socially available and shared schemas of meaning which construct and can then be read in talk, values and practices. As such they serve as heuristic devices from which to read subjectivities (Mama 1995:99). What this means is that the analysis I offer in this article is filtered through my situated hearing of the women's words and my knowledge of broader social discourses. The analysis entailed immersion in the relevant literature and the interview transcripts, reading in and across the latter for recurrent and implied themes which would suggest the presence of particular discourses of meaning (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001:413). In some instances, as I attempt to show below, the women explicitly referred to the discourse categories I invoke in the analysis. I acknowledge,

though, that they would not necessarily or always agree with that which is, ultimately, my framing of their words.

Constructing Rape

This section of the article very briefly explores the manner in which the fifteen women I interviewed constructed and theorised the phenomenon of rape in South Africa. It does so to frame the subsequent discussion of how their constructions of rape impacted upon their gendered subjectivities.

The overwhelming tendency of all except two of the fifteen women was to construct rape as the act of the socially and spatially distant—criminal, poor, racial or cultural—‘Other’ in South Africa. For instance, Sarah,* a white, upper-middle class woman, was adamant that rapists were criminals, therefore “definitely no-one in my immediate circle of friends or boyfriends or ex-boyfriends... Definitely no-one that I interact with or am friends with, or are friends with my friends.” She explained this by positing a causal connection between the high rates of crime and rape in South Africa today. Another student explained that she tended to distance rape, if irrationally, by thinking of it as the act of men who were not “educated and cultured.” Rape seemed “not that close to home” for others still because they knew of few or no friends who had been raped. Sasha, a white student from a “nice suburb,” contended that rape primarily occurred in the poorer black townships. She cited as evidence “the statistics I hear,” and the theory that the disempowerment of poverty, racialised black by apartheid, might motivate some men to rape. Sasha acknowledged too that her opinion on the social location of rape in South Africa might stem from her “personal bias: that in my environment I feel *so* sort of separated and away from it that it can only be these *other* groups of people.”

Feminist scholars have long argued that rape is most often represented in mainstream and institutional discourses as ‘stranger-danger,’ that is as the violent, indiscriminate act of an unknown, usually pathological man (Gordon and Riger 1989; Stanko 1995). Olivia did not subscribe to this discourse herself, but claimed it was prevalent in the popular imagination of rape in South Africa. She said critically: “we are looking always for this stranger-danger stuff out there. We’re not always aware how violence are [*sic*] actually just close by,” that is in the community and home. Besides the focus on strangers, media and popular narratives of rape in South Africa tend to incriminate the black man (see Moffett 2006, Posel 2005 and Scully 1995 for arguments as to why this is so). Two black women recognised but rejected the dominance of the image of the black rapist, describing it as politically invested. One, Violet, jokingly remarked that in South Africa: “white people have this idea of the black man, the proverbial black man whose sort of out there” waiting to rape and steal. And indeed, the image of the black rapist (or rapist-criminal) recurred explicitly and implicitly in six of the seven white women’s talk. The following words from one such woman strongly suggest that this image is rooted and taken for granted in a circulating narrative of rape in South Africa (also Moffett 2006):

* All names are pseudonyms used to protect the women’s identities.

sorry I'm not sure where I get [it] from but I know that's definitely very clear in my head that I've got – that when you think of rape you think of.. black guy, and it's terrible... but I know I'm not the only one who thinks like that.

If, as seen, the women tended to discursively distance rape, the implied converse was that they did not construct rape as typically or ever occurring within *their* immediate social worlds. Nonetheless, as we will also see, the women still admitted of the possibility of being raped. They could not quantify this possibility and in fact rarely spoke of rape as an actual threat. The imagination was instead a key site through which the women experienced and expressed the subjective meanings of the rape happening “out there” in their society.

Mapping Danger and Fear

The predominance of the stranger-danger discourse in the women's talk of rape meant that most located their risk in public space from strange men. This, in turn, directly impacted the ways they reported experiencing and imagining themselves in public and in their encounters with the feared Other. One woman, Anna, pictured a scene of vulnerability if hiking alone in Newlands Forest in Cape Town.³ She said:

I sort of imagine going for a walk by myself in the forest. I mean you hardly ever meet anybody that you think looks like any kind of threat you know, but what are you going to do if he really does want to attack you?

Anna naturalised the idea that she would be almost completely vulnerable to rape if accosted by a strange man whose “real” intention was rape. This imagined vulnerability led her to forego walking in the forest alone, or even alone with her dog. But citing her husband's ability to do so, Anna protested this as a gendered loss of mobility and freedom—themes explored in the discussion on rights below:

I think it's bloody unfair because I think men can always do this, you know. My husband really, he likes to go walking really early... and I just wouldn't do that on my own.

Fear of rape marked other women's daily activities and uses of space. Unlike almost all the women who lived off-campus, Mimi was not privileged to have her own car. Instead she had a one-hour train commute to UCT. Mimi told of a “psycho” man she often saw on the train who singled out young women to beg for money. Because she always refused this man, Mimi claimed to fear that he might “assault me or even rape me.” To explain why she imagined rape in the realm of possible outcomes, she said: “just knowing that rape is high in this country now, it makes me.. more.. you know, thinking along the lines that he might.” Mimi's knowledge of the high rape statistics suggested to her that rape was now a widely enacted idea or script of action for men in South Africa. Thus she reasoned that the man might also participate in this script or think to, as a means of venting his frustrations upon her. This reasoning matched Mimi's theory that rape was prevalent in South Africa because the act of socio-economically disempowered men. The result was that she felt afraid when she saw the man on the train, and sometimes moved

³ Newlands Forest is a protected indigenous and planted forest at the base of Table Mountain in a suburb of Cape Town.

to a different carriage to avoid him. But having located her potential risk of rape on the train, Mimi recognised that it was mediated by her relative privilege. She laughed when I asked her if she ever took the train at night: “*nooo*, never... that’s like asking to die... because rape is so high in this country you know... [but] some people work night shift and they have to take the train.”

Another woman, Alex, echoed that she tried to avoid men and places she experienced as threatening. She gave the example of construction workers whom she anticipated would catcall to her. Some feminists have theorised that unwanted sexual looks, calls and gestures from men may serve to remind women of their gendered subordination to male sexual power. Being catcalled may therefore heighten women’s fear and feelings of sexual vulnerability to men, even if “nothing” (more) actually happens (Kelly and Radford 1996). This theory matched Alex’s view; she characterised her everyday experiences of being catcalled as “the most common thing you get that reminds you of the fact that it is dangerous” to be a woman. However, with this statement, Alex was making a claim about her gendered experience in South Africa specifically. Having just returned from a holiday abroad, she stated: “overseas, even when guys catcall and that kind of thing, you don’t feel the fear that you feel when you’re back in South Africa.” Alex reasoned like Mimi above to explain that the difference in South Africa lay in her awareness “of the statistics and stuff, that more people get raped.”

“The statistics” dominate public discourses of rape in South Africa (Nuttall 2004; Posel 2005). Mimi, Alex and other women’s examples suggest a subjective effect of this discourse of numbers and probabilities: knowing of the high rape statistics heightened the fear that one too might be at risk of rape. Yet this heightened fear was most often limited to the contexts and kinds of men otherwise associated with rape, namely stranger-danger. Anna, for instance, noted that statistically most women were raped in their homes by men they knew. “Even so,” she maintained that knowledge of the rape statistics exacerbated *her* fear of particular, *public* scenarios, such as being alone with strange men at night in an empty parking lot. Incidentally this was the very scenario about which another woman, Vanessa, warned me, saying: “you shouldn’t go into parking lots alone cause the most attacks on women occur *in* parking lots at night.” That Anna mapped her fear and risk of rape in this very scene suggests that it is a popularly imagined site of danger, perhaps an “urban legend” Vanessa later proposed. Anna’s example also points to the power of popular discourses to shape one’s subjective risk map, despite what may be known ‘rationally’ or statistically about this risk.

Neo viewed popular rape scenarios and maps as limited and even diversionary. In her opinion, rape was fundamentally about gender relations, not race, class or crime. Therefore she located the threat of rape as omnipresent, potentially coming from any man, anywhere. The effect of this view was, for Neo, “a constant fear, for me it’s a constant fear [but] I try not to think like that.” These last words hint at the possibility of resistance to fear. Koselka (1997) makes the point that women may resist or manage their fear of violence, and that feminist scholarship must acknowledge this fact. To do so is to recognise that fearfulness is not an essential or over-determining feminine quality.

Neo recounted an instance of that which Koselka calls “reasoning,” when “in frightening situations or places, women try to convince themselves that they should not be afraid but should keep their courage” (1997:305). I interviewed Neo in a quiet corner on the UCT campus where she had hidden away to study. She explained that even sitting

there alone, particularly when others left the building at the close of day, her risk of rape came to mind. Neo replayed for me the thought process through which she reasoned away such fears: “I don’t think anything would happen. I’m most probably going to be fine. It’s such a small faculty.” Ultimately, Neo said, she forced herself to banish thoughts of her vulnerability to rape and stay late into the evening studying because “let me just live life.” Just as Koselka proposes, such reasoning by women may result not in the *absence* of fear but in the expression of agency to do as one wishes *despite* fear (1997:306). As Neo’s example explicitly shows, fear of rape does not strip women of all agency as they imagine and negotiate danger in their daily lives.

Losing Rights and Belonging

This section of the article explores how the fifteen women linked the issue of rape in South Africa to their rights and belonging in the nation. Through this lens it considers how they theorised the new democratic nation itself.

As we have heard, the primary impact of rape upon the women was that they often felt fearful and unsafe. Certainly such feelings related to their experiences and imagination of all manner of violence and crime, not just rape. This was all the more true as most viewed crime as a rampant problem. Yet for many, the possibility of rape exacerbated and gendered the fear of other crime. For example, Sarah strongly imagined that if she were someday the victim of a housebreaking, as a woman in the house her rape would be a “foregone conclusion.” Suzanne, meanwhile, explained that her boyfriend was like her very scared of crime in South Africa, but “he’s not scared of rape, that’s not what he’s scared of.” The fear of rape was women’s specific and additional fear.

Given this fear, six of the fifteen women described feeling safe and unafraid as a right or good which they should normally enjoy. They framed the lack of such feelings as a critical commentary on the diminished quality of life for women in South Africa. Tumi said of her fellow South African women:

we live in fear, we feel very unsafe... so that’s sad actually that you have to live a life where you constantly have to make, you know, measures for in case this [i.e. violence] happens.

Suzanne proposed that fear of crime and rape were now so prevalent in the country that they entered into the very meaning of being South African. She supposed that she would probably never lose “that fear that we live with on a daily basis here, that’s so normal here,” locating herself within an imagined community of fearful South Africans. But if for Suzanne, being afraid was now part and sign of belonging, Alex decried that fear precisely opposed her subjective and otherwise deep sense of nationhood. Fear made her question if she could still be “proudly South African,” an expression she borrowed from a public, democratic-nationalist slogan which aims to foster a new sense of identity in the country:

I [feel] so unsafe and it’s the one thing that would make me move away, definitely. [That] is violence, the fear and the rape and that kind of stuff... I think there is a lot of resentment in me because I feel well this is my country and I want to be safe in my country.

A white woman, Alex made this statement in the context of claiming that white South Africans were now victimised by affirmative action and land expropriation, in addition to

crime and rape. She alleged, in short, that the nation no longer welcomed its white citizens. Such views, as with the deep and pervasive fear Suzanne, also white, expressed, can be situated within the discursive frame of white, post-apartheid anxiety (Bremner 2004; Nutall 2004; Posel 2005). The “narrative of leaving” the homeland can also be read as a “narrative of whiteness” (Nutall 2001:124), not least for the transnational, embodied privilege and mobility it assumes. Leaving was mooted as an option by two other white women. But commenting from the standpoint of a black citizen, only newly *allowed* to belong, Violet explained that she was determined to be optimistic about the prospects of the nation and resist the “crippling fear” pervading the white community.

Besides fear in itself, we heard in the previous section of the article some of its everyday, lived effects: the women reported limiting their movements and activities, avoiding strange men and managing their self-presentation in public. A number presented such actions as infringing upon their normative rights and freedoms. Sasha reported that her appearance as a “young attractive girl” tended to draw unwanted male sexual attention in public, rendering her self-conscious and sometimes feeling vulnerable, unable then to “be just a person going about my everyday.” Janet also problematised the power of the male sexual gaze. When asked what it meant to live in a context in which violence against women was said to be rife, she replied:

you don’t feel like you’re in an environment where you can be safe. You don’t feel like you’re in an environment where you can be free to – I don’t know if that’s the right word – demonstrate your sexuality.

Implicitly Janet was referencing the “rape myth” that women invite rape if they sexually excite men (Ward 1995:4) to suggest that it was therefore dangerous for them to be or appear sexual. This, according to Janet, led women to mute their sexual expression, which amounted to a loss of the full freedom they should ordinarily possess.

Hazel referred to the rape myth too while speaking about the Zuma rape trial. She contended that Zuma’s defense had been guilty of “reiterating” the already common but false discourse that “the way [women] dress and the way you carry yourself is a yes or a no.” For her, the trial had been “really scary and eye-opening for seeing [the kinds of] people who are for him,” and their manifest attitudes towards rape and indeed women. It had revealed to Hazel, as had conversations with some friends, that her insistence that women never “ask for” rape was relatively progressive. Apparently, she belonged in this regard with a minority in South Africa, even amongst “people that I would regard as people of *high* levels of education, like people who have *degrees*.” Recognising this had also led Hazel to see a discrepancy between public attitudes and the law, implicitly framed in the following comment as also progressive: “the law says something about rape and sexual harassment but what people say out there I think is so much different.”

The law was the object of Neo’s fierce criticism, however. Like feminist activists have also done (e.g. Rape Crisis 2003), Neo argued that the law failed South African women because it limited rape to “forced penetration” by a penis. Given that sex comprised a range of activities other than penetration, she proposed that the law must take these into account. An assailant might “only touch my breast” Neo said, but to her it would feel like rape. Reflecting on such differences between women’s subjective definitions of rape and sexual violation and narrower, institutionalised standards, Neo sighed: “we have a long way to go, it actually frustrates me.” She was flagging the continued need for struggle for the complexities and range of women’s rape experiences

to gain due legal and societal recognition in South Africa. Sarah also commented on the inadequacies of the official attitude to rape in the country, though she proposed private withdrawal rather than public struggle as a response. She alleged that the police were incompetent and insensitive to rape survivors. Therefore, imagining the experience of being raped, the police represented for Sarah the last institution she would enlist to seek redress. Even if “by some miracle” the police caught her hypothetical rapist, she envisaged that she would still not be able to enjoy her rights to security and justice because:

in this country, they’ll get off on some technicality cause the police didn’t sort of like take the fingerprints properly or whatever you know. And that to me would be a *big* issue.

Du Toit contends that the problem of rape in South Africa has engendered a “crisis in social trust” in which women generally fear men and feel unsafe in their society (2005:254). This analysis resonates strongly with the words we have heard from the fifteen women above. She further contends that the crisis of trust extends to the state because it has thus far proven unable or unwilling to protect women citizens from rape (ibid.). This too is suggested by Neo and Sarah’s critiques just above, though it must be noted that few of the other fifteen women spoke about rape or their rights in terms of state institutions and failures. In fact, while much feminist activism and theorising in post-apartheid South Africa has sought to highlight the paradox between women’s extensive constitutional rights and continued, lived oppressions (du Toit 2005), only Olivia used this discursive frame to think about the meanings of rape in South Africa today. Olivia had “come up under apartheid,” as she put it. She believed that there was still much work to be done for the “equality entrenched in the constitution” to “translate into rights” and transformed attitudes towards women in the country. But she also considered that the society and state had come a long way in this regard. Olivia recalled from her childhood that:

this thing of violence against women was quite a major issue. But because it wasn’t the time yet for it to be looked at – I mean our governments [have since done] quite a bit on kind of *speaking* to those issues, and the Domestic Violence Act, with civil society organisations pushing for that has been quite a big, major step, because it’s, it’s beginning to kind of say ‘hey we need to legislate here.’

What Olivia was arguing was that rape and other forms of violence against women have been “put into discourse” (Foucault 1990:11) in South Africa, meaning they have now become socially, legally and subjectively ‘speaking’ experiences (also Posel 2005). Her view was that this represented *some* progress; it was, at the very least, breaking the silence and denial which previously surrounded women’s experiences of male violence.

Conclusion

This article set out to explore discourses of rape and gendered subjectivity amongst fifteen women who attest to never having been raped in South Africa, a national context which feminists and others have exposed as rape-dense. The article has shown through empirical data and analysis that these fifteen women are not unaffected by the prevalent rape of others in the society around them; instead they often imagine and fear being raped

themselves. As such, rape is a possibility they factor into their daily decisions, movements and interactions. More specifically, the possibility of rape limits them as they do these things. This is so although the women, repeating dominant discourses and theories, tend to minimise their personal risk by locating 'men who rape' outside their relatively privileged social worlds. Prior to and superseding this fact is, for the women, the discursive and embodied assumption that they are always necessarily vulnerable to rape *because* they are women.

The research upon which this article is based is of course limited by the number of women interviewed, as well as their elite positioning at the University of Cape Town. However, I would argue that this work suggests further avenues for feminist research and activism concerning rape in South Africa. The article has sought to illustrate the power of discourse to make rape 'real,' in the sense of a factor taken into account in everyday life. Accordingly it has traced the largely detrimental subjective and social effects of the discourses of rape the women deployed. This suggests the need for further feminist research to explore and challenge the production and politics of hegemonic discourses of rape in South Africa, for it is contestable that these do not accurately represent the problem at hand. If extended, the preliminary findings of this study suggest grounds for renewed and redirected activism against rape: they suggest that the *imagination and fear*, not just the threat and actuality of rape, may deny women their full exercise of freedom in the post-apartheid nation.

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